1:Seligmann & Seligmann E-5 (1907-1908) 1911
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CHAPTER II

PRESENT CONDITION OF THE VEDDAS

WE propose to treat the Veddas under three headings :— 101

(i) Veddas.
(ii) Village Veddas.
(iii) Coast Veddas.

Although it may not be easy in every case to say into which group a given person falls, and although the proposed classification rests on no natural or known physical basis, it seems that at the present day the Veddas fall into these three groups characterised by different sociological features. The term "Rock" or "Jungle" Vedda will be avoided; it has been applied by some authors to the wilder specimens of that class which we propose to call simply Veddas.

The coast Veddas are briefly described in Chapter XII.; they live in scattered villages on the east coast and are chiefly to be found north of Batticaloa. They have much Tamil blood [563] in their veins, and though often taller than pure Veddas, some still retain an appearance which suggests their Vedda origin. This is far more marked in the males than in the females, and it appeared to us that any of the latter might have been local Tamils, whereas some of the men clearly differed from the surrounding population.

Before giving an account of the present condition of the 115 different Vedda communities, we propose to give the substance of a number of conversations with a remarkable old Kandyan who in his boyhood, youth and manhood was closely associated with the Veddas of the Eastern Province, and whose memory certainly goes back for 80 or 90 years. In order to make his

1;Seligmann & Seligmann E-5 (1907-1908) 1911
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account intelligible we must anticipate certain later chapters to the extent of defining the terms *warugy* and *yaka*, that is we must refer briefly to the essential features of the Vedda social system and religion.

Every Vedda belongs to a *warugy* or clan, as the term may be translated, and among a large number of the Vedda communities still existing, exogamy is the absolute rule. Further, with exogamy is associated descent in the maternal line, so that the fundamentals of the social system of the Veddas may, perhaps, be summed up as a clan organization with female descent. There is no evidence, as far as we can determine, of any dual organization of the clans, but perhaps they had originally a territorial distribution. Ignoring for a moment such debatable matters, the Vedda clans are:—

(1) Morane *warugy*.
(2) Unapane *warugy*.
(3) Namadewa or Nabedan *warugy*.
(4) Aembela *warugy*.
(5) Uru *warugy*.
(6) Tala *warugy*.
(7) A number of other so-called *warugy* of minor strength and importance, which perhaps may be local groups that have forgotten their origin and have assumed a name (sometimes obviously a place-name) as a convenience.

Turning now to the Vedda religion the word *yaka* (feminine *yakini*, plural *yaku*) is used to denote the spirits of the dead, and since the Vedda religion is essentially a cult of the dead, it is not surprising that the propitiation of the spirits of dead relatives, called the Nae Yaku, is at once its most obvious and important feature. With this is associated the cult of the spirits of certain long dead Veddas who may be regarded as legendary heroes. The most important of these is Kande Yaka, the *yaka* of Kande Wanniya, a celebrated hunter who lived many generations ago and whose assistance is invoked for good hunting. Kande Yaka especially helps in the tracking of sambur and spotted deer, and with him is often associated Bilindi Yaka, the *yaka* of his younger brother Bilindi. When a deer has been killed the head is set aside, and with rice and

1:Seligmann & Seligmann E-5 (1907-1908) 1911
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coconut milk (when procurable) dedicated to Kande Yaka, after which it is eaten with the rice. An essentially similar ceremony often spoken of by the same name (*kiriberuka*), but in which no meat is offered, is held after a death in order to propitiate the spirit of the dead man. The majority of Veddas believe that the Nae Yaku go to Kande Yaka, and become in some sense his attendants, and Kande Yaka, sometimes accompanied by Bilindi Yaka, is generally invoked at the beginning of the Nae Yaku ceremony. It was stated more than once that the Nae Yaku could not come to the offering unless accompanied by Kande Yaka, who was even spoken of as bringing the Nae Yaku. Some of our informants also said that the spirit of the deceased resorted to Kande Yaka and obtained his permission to accept offerings from his living relatives, in return for which the Nae Yaka would assist or injure them according to their behaviour, so that Kande Yaka, besides being of the greatest assistance in hunting, has also become the Lord of the Dead.

The Kandyan already mentioned, whose full title is Karagahavella Adenayaka Mudiyanselage Tissahami, visited us at Bandaraduwa; he lived at Bakiyella some ten miles from our camp. Mr Bibile, who was distantly related to the old man, told us that he must be nearly a hundred years old, since he had been brought to the wild country of the Eastern Province by his mother during the rebellion of 1818, his father having fallen in the fighting. His hair, of which he retained a fair quantity, was absolutely white and worn short, his complexion was pale with age, he had a slight unilateral facial paralysis and he walked with the aid of a stick, his back being bowed and both knees somewhat flexed; but he was withal an extraordinarily active old man, extremely intelligent and with an excellent memory, the play of the muscles of his face showing how well he realised the import of the questions addressed to him and how much they interested him. Further, his frank replies when he did not understand a question and the emphatic manner in which he delivered his answers carried conviction of the value of his evidence, and we believe that no one who listened to the old man would have considered him other than a good witness.

1:Seligmann & Seligmann E-5 (1907-1908) 1911
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115 There were both "wild" and "village" Veddas even in the days of his youth, and the only difficulty experienced with the old man was in keeping the two classes perfectly distinct in his mind. The following facts were elicited in the course of three interviews, each lasting somewhat less than an hour. He stated that he was just able to walk when he came to the Eastern Province, and that as he grew up he spent much of his time with the Veddas hunting and collecting honey. The [156] Veddas of these days were a merry people, and with a most eloquent gesture the old man showed how they would throw dry leaves into the air and shout and dance for happiness; he said also that they were absolutely truthful. Every Vedda carried a 411 bow and arrows and an axe; more arrows than one were carried, but it was not clear that they only carried two; it seemed that *tudadi*, a word that the old man said was used to describe the number of arrows carried, may have meant a small quantity or may have been a hunting term corresponding to "brace" or "leash." The old man had seen Veddas shoot lying on their backs and holding the bow with their feet, but this was only for amusement and to show their skill, no serious shooting was done in this way. The feathers of peacocks, herons and hawks were especially used in feathering arrows; any of these [262] birds would be shot with an ordinary arrow, and peacock was eaten as was jungle fowl, though no one would eat porcupine or buffalo; for these abstinences he could give no reason. Traps 226 were not used. Fish were eaten, being caught by poisoning the 278 water of pools with the bark of *damba*, *tuhapata*, *puvalpata* (? *Entada scandens*) and the fruit of *timbiri* (*Diospyros embryopteris*) and *kuhuruman* (*Adenanthera bicolor*). Pots and bark 415 cloth bags were made and betel pouches of monkey skin, though even then some village Veddas had cloth betel bags, and these occasionally reached the wilder Veddas. Among the village 304 Veddas both sexes bored their ears and the women wore ivory 301 studs in them; whether the women of the wilder groups bored 184 their ears and wore these ornaments was not clear, certainly 372 the men did not. Fire was obtained from two pieces of wood by drilling.

342 The wilder Veddas of those days built no houses but lived
437

1:Seligmann & Seligmann E-S (1907-1908) 1911
AMS Vedda AMS

badly off and in varying conditions of ill health and malnutrition, there is abundant evidence that only a generation back these communities were composed of a large number of families who, although they made chenas, led a healthy hunting life for a great part of the year. Plate XI, figure 2, represents some men and children of the Bandaraduwa chena settlement; from this photograph it is evident that in spite of their prosperity even twenty-five years ago, there must have been much miscegenation, and the appearance of a couple of old grey-headed men alleged Veddas whom we saw in this neighbourhood certainly suggested that they possessed only a fraction of Vedda blood[1].

The following account of the Kovil Vanamai Veddas as they existed some 20 or 25 years ago was given us by Tissahami, Arachi[2] of Potuliyadde, a man who on account of his long association with Veddas is often spoken of as the Vedda Arachi. This man though presenting the appearance of a typical Kandyan Sinhalese has Vedda blood in his veins, for his ancestors were Veddas of Moranegala in the Eastern Province, his great grandfather being a Vedda shaman who settled at Damenegama in Uva Province. Although this man's descendants intermarried with the local Sinhalese (who are themselves in part the descendants of Veddas) and adopted the Sinhalese mode of life, one man at least in each generation continued to act as shaman (S. *kapuvale*), and the father of the Arachi was a devil dancer and *vaderale* (native doctor) of some note. This man's son, the Arachi, now a man of between 40 and 50, exerts a great deal of influence over the peasants in his neighbourhood, who all recognise that he is in more or less constant communication with the spirits, to which fact his neighbours attribute much of his success. In this manner was explained the quickness with which he recently learnt blacksmith's work. We had not heard of his re-

[1] Some of the "Veddas" living in the neighbourhood of Bandaraduwa and the sea are comparatively tall, stoutly built men with no appearance of Vedda ancestry. Two men from Uhene in Nadukada Pattu measured 65 and 65½ inches respectively. Two men, who looked like Tamils but called themselves Veddas, lived on big Sinhalese chenas at Kotelinda; one of them said that his wife's parents had belonged to the Galmoda group.

[2] *Arachi* is the title applied to the headman of a Sinhalese village settlement.

1:Seligmann & Seligmann E-5 (1907-1908) 1911
AX5 Vedda AX5

115 putation when he first joined our party, but it was very soon evident that he was handier, quicker and more intelligent in every way than the other peasant Sinhalese with whom we came in contact. Still later we discovered that by his influence a large clearing had been illegally made in a remote part of the jungle near Nuwaragala, and that on account of this he was doing his best to prevent our coming in contact with the Sitala Wanniya Veddas in whose territory the clearing had been made. Although in this he played us false and caused much needless trouble we found him in other matters a perfectly trustworthy witness, and as he had associated more or less constantly with the Kovil Vanamai Veddas from the age of 10 to 20, there is every reason 161 to accept his account of their condition 25 years ago. At this 221 time there were about 50 families, i.e. some 200 people, who led 621 a wandering hunting life for half of the year, during which time they lived in rock shelters and depended largely on honey; for the rest of the year they paid more or less attention to chena cultivation, growing especially maize and *kurakkan* (*Eleusine coracana*). Two or three families—not necessarily the same year after year—would usually wander and hunt together; such groups of families might also make chenas together, though five or six families would often join to make a single chena.

222 Although they had a few guns even 20 years ago, bows and 411 arrows were in common use and much of their hunting consisted 423 of monkey drives. There were no mixed Sinhalese and Vedda chenas then. The Arachi remembers three caves belonging to 621 the ancestors of the present Bandaraduwa Veddas, viz. Walinbagalagalge, Ellavellagalge and Vianbendegalge. Each family was the recognised possessor of one or more rocky hills on which there were colonies of the rock bee, but the whole of the small hunting community would join to collect honey from each hill and the honey was always equally shared.

614 The Kovil Vanamai Veddas belonged to Morane and Unapane and Uru *warugu*. The latter lived apart near Uniche, i.e. between Tumpalamcholai and the coast. The Arachi states 197 that the language has altered during the last 20 years, Tamil 178 tending to displace Sinhalese, thus *tirakodoi*, "nothing," is said

1;Seligmann & Seligmann E-5 (1907-1908) 1911
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a surplus to barter with the Moormen on their annual visit, or to take into the nearest Sinhalese village to exchange for iron, cloth, pots and occasional rice and coconuts.

Plate XIII represents the women of this group, the plates on which the men were photographed were accidentally destroyed shortly after we left Sitala Wanniya. Handuna whose height was 1·530 mm. (60¼ inches) looked a typical Vedda; Vela who was two inches taller also had a Vedda physiognomy though his appearance was not so typical; Kaira and Pema both looked as though they were of mixed blood, and Nila, height 1·555 mm. (61¼ inches), shown in Plate LV, would certainly not be taken for a Vedda at all.

Neither the assurance of a regular supply of food, nor the apathy produced by gradual starvation, had caused them to neglect their old ceremonies, and we found that once these people had overcome their shyness they were communicative, extremely courteous and merry. When the men understood they were free to come to our camp whenever they liked and that areca nut and betel leaves were always ready for them, they granted us the same freedom of their own cave, only stipulating that we should never allow our servants to go near it.

When they first led us to their cave we noticed that they stopped and shouted when about a quarter of a mile distant and did not proceed until an answering shout was heard. This they said was their custom and was equally observed whether they were accompanied by strangers or not. The place at which they stopped was their usual dancing ground as well as the spot on which pedlars were received and barter carried on, for strangers were never allowed to approach their caves or see their women.

Galmede. A family of Veddas of the Galmede group, seen at Godatalawa, consisted of ten persons who had left their old home in the Nuwaragala Hills, and who appeared to be moderately pure-blooded. The old man of the community proved a good informant, remembering a considerable number of old customs and invocations, but he was not a shaman, and as there was not one in the community most of the customs had fallen into desuetude. The members of this community were living on a very poor chena and, when we saw them, were in great difficulties as

[Lenerum; see p. xx. — Analyst]

his movements, he nevertheless does not retain any clear recollection of what he says, and only a general idea of the movements he has performed. Although there is doubtless a certain element of humbug about some of the performances, we believe that this is only intentional among the tamer Veddas accustomed to show off before visitors, and that among the less sophisticated Veddas the singing and movements of the dance soon produce a more or less automatic condition, in which the mind of the shaman, being dominated by his belief in the reality of the *yaku*, and of his coming possession, really acts without being in a condition of complete volitional consciousness. Most sincere practitioners whom we interrogated in different localities agreed that although they never entirely lost consciousness, they nearly did so at times, and that they never fully appreciated what they said when possessed, while at both the beginning and end of possession they experienced a sensation of nausea and vertigo and the ground seemed to rock and sway beneath their feet.

Some men, including Handuna of Sitala Wanniya, whom we consider one of the most trustworthy of our informants, said that they were aware that they shivered and trembled when they became possessed, and Handuna heard booming noises in his ears as the spirit left him and full consciousness returned. He said this usually happened after he had ceased to dance. We could not hear of any shaman who saw visions while possessed or experienced any olfactory or visual hallucinations before, during, or after possession. The Veddas recognise that women may become possessed, but we only saw one instance of (alleged) possession in a woman, which occurred at a rehearsal of a dance got up for our benefit on our first visit to Bendiyagalge, during which we are confident that none of the dancers were really possessed. Although we did not see the beginning of this woman's seizure we have little doubt that there was a large element of conscious deception in her actions, for when we became aware of her she was sitting bolt upright with her eyes shut and the lids quivering, apparently from the muscular effort of keeping them tightly closed, while opposite her was Tissahami the Vedda Arachi muttering spells over a coconut shell half full of water with which he dabbed her eyes and face.

1:Seligmann & Seligmann E-5 (1907-1908) 1911
AXE Vedda AXE

the offering is placed. The dance is held at night and continues until morning when the whole community eat the offering, though only the men dance. We were shown a pot in a small cave near the settlement which was said to be kept there purposely, and which it was stated was used for boiling rice for the ceremony.

We may now consider the religious beliefs of certain communities in which the third stratum of belief already alluded to is dominant. Such communities are the village Veddas of Uva Bintenne and those of the Eastern Province and Tamankaduwa, among all of whom the *Nae Yaku* were known and reverenced, but the great Vedda heroes have all disappeared, their place having been taken by numerous Sinhalese gods and demons. Some of the village Veddas even build temples, rough bark or mud huts like their own habitations in which the various symbols of the *devāyo* and *yaku* are kept and in which the shamas dances.

Such a temple was seen at Yakure dedicated to Gange Bandar Deyo, here also were two rough stones leaning against a tree on the *bund* of Yakurewaewa which were held sacred to Gane Deyo (Ganesa).

At a place called Nadena, where there were said to be Veddas until a few years ago, on the road running inland from Patrippu in the Eastern Province, there is a temple containing an image of Ganesa and this is looked upon as a Vedda shrine. Other temples or shrines in the Eastern Province are traditionally associated with Veddas though none survive at the present day, except, we believe, at Portiv[illegible] near Patrippu and at Mandur.

VILLAGE VEDDAS OF THE BINTENNE.

At Dambani and the neighbouring settlements of Bulugahaladena and Wellampelle the *Nae Yaku* are held to be of great importance. Reference has already been made on p. 50 to the difficulty of working with these village Veddas, and our information concerning the religious beliefs of the Dambani folk was obtained from the Arachi of Belligala; with regard to Bulugahaladena and Wellampelle the little information we possess was obtained at first hand and carefully checked, and

1:Seligmann & Seligmann E-5 (1907-1908) 1911
AX5 Vedda AX5

though incomplete we have no doubt of its substantial accuracy as far as it goes. We had considerable doubts as to the reliability of our Dambani information, but these have been removed lately as far as they affect Kande Yaka and the *Nae Yaku* owing to the kindness of Mr Hartshorne who allowed us to look through a number of notes collected among these people thirty years ago. And since the information obtained from the Arachi of Belligala was correct on these points, there seems to be no reason to disbelieve the rest of his information.

According to the Arachi, who, it must be remembered, as stated on p. 49, knows the Dambani folk well, there are three important classes of *yaku*.

The first of these are the *Nae Yaku* who do not go to Kande Yaka but to Indigollae Yaka, who lives on a hill (*kande*) called Indigollae Kande which never has been seen. Indigollae Yaka is first invoked at the *Nae Yaku* ceremony and with him come the *Nae Yaku*. An *aude* is used in calling upon Indigollae Yaka in this ceremony, while the *Nae Yaku* are invoked by means of a cloth and beads; as among other Veddas an offering of food is made.

We could not discover with certainty at Dambani what was the relative importance of the *Nae Yaku* and the two other classes of *yaka*, but at Bulugahaladena and Wellampelle our informants made it quite clear that the *yaku* of recent ancestors were the most important. Thus Kuma stated that he considered his father's *yaka* to be the most important of all and that this spirit was invoked alike to send game and in thanks for game killed.

Bandia of Wellampelle said the most important *yaka* he knew was Punchi Badena, his father's father; his mother is dead but her *yaka* is not so important[1]. Punchi Badena is invoked to get game and honey or when people are sick. At all three villages a structure, which from the description given to us resembles an *alutyakagama*, is built for the invocation of the *Nae Yaku*, to whom the customary offerings are made before

[1] We have no note that the father of Kuma was dead; although we do not remember definitely inquiring about this our impression is that both parents had been dead for some time.

4: Lewis N-5 (ca. 1906-1918) 1919
AX5 Vedda AX5

197 recognize a single expression. The following morning I taxed
198 the people with speaking in Vedda language, but they stoutly declared that they could only speak Sinhalese.

In my opinion the majority of the people of the Maha Wedirata are of Vedda origin, but have discarded their
[177] primitive customs as they dwindled in numbers, and while
178] other causes, such as marriage with neighbouring people, tended to still further break down the older customs of the isolated clans that made up the Vedda race as a whole, they still clung in secret to the language of their forefathers, as a binding link and a means of private communication.

115 At Salavai, in the Panawa Pattu, I found one family who admitted that their grandfather was a real Vedda, belonging to one of the clans occupying the country on the confines of the Kumbukkan river.

From the oldest member of this family I obtained a mass of information respecting the habits and customs of the Vedda people.

614 According to this individual, who has adopted the Sinhalese
[563] name of Dissan Hamy, the Veddas were divided up into a number of waruge or clans, each of which occupied and hunted over a specific area of country, and had no connection with the others who lived as separate communities.

The members of each clan were more or less related, and previous to the disintegration of the Veddas as a race, they could not marry any but members of the same waruge.

[462] They lived by hunting, in which only the males took part. Their habitations were caves, and occasionally leaf shelters, but the latter was uncommon.

562 The females were kept in a state of rigid subjection to the
593 males, and could not take part in the chase, ordinary ceremonials, or conversation with any but those who were immediate relations, or the closest relatives of the husband.

562 If the husband was pleased to *throw* some meat to his wife,
593 as part of his spoil in the chase, that was all the woman was
224 entitled to. She could not claim a share simply because she was the man's wife.

291 Under ordinary circumstances, both the males and females
924 were naked, assuming only for special occasions a loin cloth

5: Spittel II-5 (ca. 1920) 1945 AX5 Vedda AX5

115 On our return journey, passing the ruins of a remarkable aqueduct
173 of stone—the Watawala Kandiya—beside the remains of a crumbling
bund, we arrived at Kurunduwina where we met a doddering ancient
439 who claimed to have been alive when the British took Ceylon a hundred years ago. It is not often one meets old folk in these unhealthy lands. Here, I thought, was one who could tell us something about Veddas of a type we could not hope to see; for within view of his hut were the Sittala Wanniya hills, the immemorial homes of the Veddas. But his decrepit mind needed much jogging.

"Are there Veddas here?" I shouted twice into his deaf old ears.

"Now none," he said.

"Did they live on the rocks yonder?" I asked. He nodded affirmatively.

"Did they come here to barter?" I persisted. His tired lack-lustre eyes flashed to a memory as he answered with surprising alacrity, "Yes they came. When they had no food they came to exchange honey and hides for food. The Vedda would sit there, place his bow there, his arrows there, and his axe there, and he would ask for betel. If any one stepped over his weapons by chance, he would leap up in anger, bite the piece of human liver he carried in his betel-bag, and ask, 'Who's this that dares to defy me?' The gleam faded from the old man's eye, his weary look returned and he uttered not another word, question as I might.

The shifting *chenas* scattered about these parts make it very difficult to say where a village begins or ends. We were resting on the banks of the Rambukkan, (a course parallel to which we had so far followed) somewhere on the confines of Payile and Idambowa, when to our surprise we saw a Buddhist priest accompanied by the inevitable *abithaya** and a tall, wild, naked fellow. A Vedda of Bingoda the latter was said to be.
[609] We tried to engage him in talk, but he would have none of it; seated on his haunches he stared at us with a hang-dog apathy eloquent of hunger; this melted away in a broad grin as he left us, greedily chewing the handful of muscatels and biscuits we gave him.

The usual route from here to Potuliyadda lay through the village of Mullagama. As this involved a detour we decided on a more direct if less used track; a decision we afterwards regretted as it lost us the interesting Veddas of Bingoda, and incidentally a clue to the discrepancy between Seligmann's statement and local report regarding the Veddas of the "Nuwaragala hills"—a missed opportunity the full significance of which we were only to realise some five years later after miles of
[621] arduous and unnecessary travel. For the present we were told that the Veddas of Bingoda consisted of only three families, and that, though they forsook their huts for caves during the honey season, they were, if anything, less of the real Vedda than those of Henebedde.

Our journey was now an uncertainty; for the guides were doubtful both of the route and the likelihood of water. The jungle, hitherto dense, gave place to an occasional glade. Late in the evening we found ourselves in a spacious *talawa*, rank with tall grass that quite obliterated our path. Here we were benighted, just as we found a pool adequate to our needs. It was an interesting place, a veritable sanctuary, hill-encircled; an ideal

*A neophyte, attendant on a priest.

3. THE MARAWEETHIYA

Far or forgot to me is near,
Shadow and sunlight are the same;
The vanished gods to me appear
And one to me are shame and fame.

EMERSON

13 FROM Yakkure to Horiwila is six miles. The first part of the journey is through marsh; here the Mahaweli make a bend which all but encroaches on the path. The place is rank with vegetation. Tall grass thrives amidst sombre trees that stand apart, clothed out of all recognition in stoles of trailing mycania. The air is humid and oppressively still. One is glad to be rid of the swampy luxuriance with its strong suggestion of malaria.

Beyond a pleasant stretch of paddy, closer than we had ever seen it before, stood Gunner's Quoin. Tinkling cow-bells and the mournful cries of peafowl welcomed us to Horiwila.

361 144 The racial types we have passed, will repay review. Omuna, Dolagalwella and Kalukolu Eba were shifting *chena* settlements inhabited by Veddas with a large proportion of Sinhalese blood. Yakkure was a permanent village with the *chenas* apart; here the people called themselve Veddas but showed strong Tamil traits. The folk of Horiwila were not sure whether to call themselves Tamils or Veddas; while Manampitiya, beyond Horiwila, was a purely Tamil village. So does propinquity shape the type of Vedda, and forest penetration by the Sinhalese on the one hand and Tamils on the other, tend to obliterate the aboriginal race.

000 Decoyed by its beauty, we camped on a rock on the bund of the Horiwila tank, soon to learn that a stone exposed all day to the sun, was not the most desirable of camping places even at night. The stored heat radiating from the rock kept us awake till morning, and we rose quite unrefreshed for the good day's work before us, for to-day we would climb the Quoin, which, ever since we saw it across the marsh at Yakkure, beckoned us on. The Tamils of the place could only take us to the base 115 of the hill; from there a Vedda of the Ulpotta must guide us. It was quite an hour before we found him. I recognised him at once as Sinna an old friend; there were the bunions on his shoulder from carrying loads of lizards and yams, and there the hooked finger caused by a snake-bite [142 when plucking a *kanava* comb from a creviced tree. A dwarf, with 157] frizzly upstanding hair and wild eyes, and shy almost to timidity, Sinna had nothing of the sophisticated Vedda about him. He lived alone with [166] his small family at the end of the rock. The rest of his people had left when the *kurrukkan* crop failed: but Sinna remained to gather a precarious living from the scanty pickings of the field. We came on him searching for food in the forest.

The poor fellow was in great distress that morning, his favourite dog having been taken by a leopard the previous night. Hearing the animal's

5: Spittel D-5 (ca. 1920) 1945 AX5 Vedda AX5

cries he had rushed in vain to the rescue. It speaks much for the dominance of man over animals that this puny fellow, armed only with a small hatchet, could live with impunity in such surroundings; and moreover leave his wife and children unprotected in their fragile leaf-hut while he was out in quest of food.

"Cha," I heard Sinna ruminating sorrowfully to himself, "the *gos*-catching dog is gone."

"Have you no other?" I asked.

"The one that's left isn't much good," he said. "With the bitch I lost I could catch six *goyas** a day."

The way to the caves was up the heavily-wooded, boulder-encumbered side of the hill, plentiful with caves of bear, porcupine and wild cat. On the sandy floor of one dark den were the footprints of a bear and her cubs that had just vacated it. Sinna was well ahead of us, as we clambered on trembling knees regardless of all else but where to gain foot-hold, when a timorous one called out to the Vedda from below, "There now, if a bear should come, don't you run away and climb a tree."

The little chap wagged his head acquiescingly. I asked him what he would do in such an event.

"We will also strike; he will also bite," was the cool reply.

Gaining a spur, at length we attained the first of the series of caves known as the Maraweethiya. A strong aroma of bats greeted us. Ant-hills grew out of the dusty floor of the cave, the plastered dome of which was ornamented with frescoes of Buddhas and *devas*. A decayed wooden image stood behind a flat altar stone supported on bricks, many of which lay fallen about. A broken wall partially shut in the cave, and another divided it off from a deep pool of crystalline water.

From here a passage protected by a low wall led through a narrow gulley flanked by small trees; thence by way of spurs, tunnels and deep grottoes we came to a shallow cave in full face of the sky, where we were the cause of much concern to a pair of peregrine falcons. They hovered above us crying perturbedly; now they would swoop boldly down almost within reach of our hands; now wing away with harsh cackling cries of alarm, as they discovered us handling their eggs, that lay amidst the debris of brick and tile.

Ahead was a fearsome pass, which we must negotiate to reach the last of the caves. It was no more than a shallow, sloping notch in the sheer side of the rock, overlooking a drop of about three hundred feet, and with seemingly nothing beyond it but eternity. On hands and knees we crawled through and were mightily relieved to find ourselves in the security of a large grotto. Here, before two patched stone images, we found a few of our carriers devoutly kneeling; on an altar-stone were their meagre oblations of ixora blooms they had gathered on the way. The virtue, it would seem, lay less in the quality of the offerings than in the attainment of this inhospitable shrine with its weathered and lonely gods.

We could go no farther; but hence along the crazy edge of the hill was the merest semblance of a break-neck way that led, we were told, to the ancient kingdom of the *rakshayas* (demons) with its foot-wide

*Monitor lizard

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13 causeway over an abysmal ravine. We had not the stomach to tempt those ways.

Below us stretched a vast forest studded with the tree-clad hills of Omuna, Henanagalla and many another; and over the red-topped *bongs* we caught the glimpse of the Mahaweli as it cleft the wilderness of trees.

173 To this retreat once came an ascetic who lived alone, lost in meditation, for months. His evening chant could be heard at Horiwila three miles away. The bears that came to drink at the pools in the caves did him no harm. In a hidden vault, so the story goes, he found a gold-lettered slab and a phial of oil. He made the wisdom of the script his own, and drank the oil; then descended the rock, and ever after went about as one obsessed.

115 [301] Sinna's droll talk relieved the irksomeness of our descent. Indicating a wild jasmine, he told us they were the flowers Vedda women strung on creeper-stems for the adornment of their hair. He was for leaving us at the foot of the hill and continuing his search for food for his waiting family. But we took him to camp, fed him abundantly on rice and venison and gave him a heavy hamper besides. It was pleasant to picture the rare joy of his home-coming.

000 At Manampitiya old Kanapan-*vidane* met us with two limes which he graciously presented to us. This charming Tamil custom is often the prelude to a villainous request. Kanapan gave us cordial welcome, eyed solicitously our unkempt figures, and chided us in a kindly, paternal way for undertaking so 'terrible' a journey. "Why wander in the wilderness when you can play about the highways in your car?" he said. His conversation, though varied kept reverting to one theme—the delinquencies of the village school-master, now away on a holiday. Kanapan had a penchant for denunciation; on a previous occasion it was the tyranny of an apothecary, now it concerned the amours of a pedagogue.

"Is that the sort of man to teach young children?" he concluded disgustedly. "A man who breaks up quiet homes. The woman does not even care for him; he bewitched her with charmed food. A respectable home wrecked by a worthless fellow!" and he spat with scorn.

Perhaps it was the full bottle of whisky standing tantalisingly on the table that induced him to confide in us that the village tavern had now been closed for over two years, during which time he had not touched a drink; he had almost forgotten the taste of liquor he said wistfully.

"Then you are a total abstainer now?" I ventured.

"What's to be done, sir, I have to be," he sighed.

"I suppose you wouldn't have a drink now if one were given you?" I asked.

"How can I refuse when a gentleman offers," said he, taking the wind out of my sails. "With your favour, sir, I will. Cha," he continued with sudden affection, "I feared you had been to the war and got killed. How glad I am to see you again, sir."

We poured him a bumper which he swallowed neat, placing the empty cup within easy reach beside him. He reverted to the school-master;

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some unfortunate who had trodden on a wriggling thing. We learnt too late that we had over-shot the game *talawas* of Wavinna by four miles. There was nothing for it, but to plough back through the mud at five the following morning, and to return at ten with a fine buck greatly to the joy of our dispirited company.

Veddas were my quest. Wherever I went, whomever I met, my one question was, "Are there any Veddas hereabout?" So far I had no luck.

A tall slouching man, obliging to obsequiousness, was the *aratchi* of Paragahakelle. He it was who first told me, as he escorted us the next morning, that good Veddas were to be found up north at Galmede. Years ago an illness took him there in search of a famous *vedarala** who one day said to him, "Let us go and see the Veddas." He found them in caves, clothed in leaf and beaten bark, grinding *kurrukkan* and maize with fragments of stone. They stank superbly, and averred that if they poured water on their heads they would surely die. But that was twenty years ago. Would we find them so to-day? The Veddas of Galmede became an obsession and a hope.

Reaching Hinimidurawa that evening the *aratchi* also told us that across the field were people who called themselves Veddas. Even as he spoke one of these joined us. Shifting his gaze from our guns to the fresh spoor of an elephant, he said, "That brute will certainly kill us one day; we cannot escape him. All last night he had me up that tree in the *chena*. A few weeks ago he pulled down one of our huts killing a man and his son." He suggested we might hunt the beast.

"Where is he now?" I asked.

"I drove him that way last night," he said, indicating the direction of our proposed camp. This was not reassuring; the ravages of the animal were in evidence everywhere.

We settled down for the night by a stream that intersected the path. Large fires were lit and the men asked leave to sing, for it was not safe to be voiceless in the feeding grounds of so notorious a 'rogue'. Even as the forest echoed to lewd snatches, we heard the challenge. Having arranged for an all-night watch we were soon asleep. I was roused at midnight by a blowing sound quite close to me. The fires had died out and no one was awake! Groping in the dark I tugged at the first human leg I touched, but it was quite a while before its owner awoke, yawned—and grasped the situation. Then for ten minutes the forest rang to an uproar that might have scared a demon. The next morning, traces in the sand revealed the story. Lying as we were full in the path of the elephant, it had come to within ten yards of us on its nightly visit to the *chena*; then, suddenly changing its mind, it had turned away. It was well I woke when I did.

Heenbanda, a Vedda of Hinimidurawa, illustrated, from personal experience, the potency of a charm he gave us: Coming suddenly on a she-bear with cubs, he had shouted his charm as she rushed at him. The animal was hurled back, spread-eagled, as if struck. Recovering, she advanced again, and this time clasped the unfortunate man by the neck with her fore legs, while with her hind paws she ripped his abdomen; marks of which encounter he still carried. Heenbanda's brother who

*Native physician.

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triangle bounded on the south by the Gal Oya: on the west by the Bibile-Batticaloa road: and on the east by the coast road. Within this space are found the Veddas of Danigala, Henebedda and Bingoda, besides the few about Kotelinda, Divulana and Serangamadu. If to this tract were added that to the west and north of the Bibile-Batticaloa road, between it and the Mahaweli-ganga, we shall have embraced the Veddas of Bintenne, Gunner's Quoin, and other scattered settlements, and accounted for every Vedda extant—a mere handful of people in all.

Kaurala of Kotelinda was the first Vedda worthy of the name we had encountered on this long journey. He was a Bingoda Vedda of the Morana *warige*, but had spent most of his days at Bandaradua now derelict. He lived with his family in a crude hut in the jungle; his sole weapons were an axe, a bow and arrows. He was a simple soul, laughing uproariously at one moment, and the next assuming that troubled gravity so characteristic of his race. He knew every inch of his jungles; there was no tree, stream, or stone once passed which he could not instantly recognise again. This instinct and the sun were his sole means of orientation. We tried to press him into service, but he refused. "How can I come?" he said, tossing head and arms like a windmill. "I am a lone man. I live in the jungle. I am only a Vedda. If I go, who is there to look after my children? See here, now," pointing to the damaged trees about his hut; "this is what the *botukandas** have done. How can I come?"

Our deviation to Kotelinda was in vain. We had hoped to cut across the hills of Madana to Galmede; but the path had long been absorbed into the forest. We had therefore to double back to Bokkebedda, and thence strike north, through Gonagalla, to Divulana. With our usual ill-luck on this trip, we caught our fifth thunderstorm. It dropped plumb on us and worried us all the way; while in the unscathed beyond, over the treed parkland, the sunset wrought a panorama of opal and pearl, touching to glory the austere peak of Friar's Hood, queen of the distant hills.

*Elephants.

3. A VEDDA OF DIVULANA

DIVULANA was recompense for our toil. The irrigation bungalow, placed high above the bund, over-looked the beautiful hill-encircled tank, whose glassy surface was broken by stones and snags on which cormorants and darters sunned.

Two miles within the forest lived Naga-Kauwa, a witless dwarf of fifty, the sole Vedda of Divulana. Born in Kovil Vannami, he came as a child to the Rasagala caves, of which in their best day his people occupied four or five. Now he and his family alone survived. Three years ago he had abandoned cave life for that of the *chena* ; and there we found him amidst his cassava and the tender teak he nursed for a consideration from Government.

His stalwart sons—quite unlike the father—brought us some yams, a mouse deer and a primitive drum—the broken-off rim of an earthen pot covered with wanderoo skin and fitted with a taut fibre.

Kauwa's hut was a thing to behold. The Tamils had said, "See Kauwa, this is the way to build a house" ; and Kauwa had built this crazy thing a child of twelve might have bettered. The thatch was a medley of dry grass and bark ; the walls were of wattle, which stuck out untrimmed through the roof, and bark slats so poorly fitted together that there was more aperture than cover. The structure was no more than four-foot square and two-storied at that ; merely a covered trestle three feet off the ground. In the lower floor his wife and children lay huddled like rats ; on the upper, its irregularities smoothed with bundles of rush (primary elements of a mat), the lord and master slept. Such was the caveman's first attempt at fashioning an abode. By the entrance was a fireplace, and, scattered about, were the bones of monkeys and monitor lizards and the carapaces of tortoises that had served for food. Stuck in the roof was a broken comb of buffalo horn, true touch of civilisation, for the test of a real Vedda is that his hair must be stranger to a comb.

Getting information from Kauwa was like squeezing water out of a stone ; he could no more describe the simplest thing than he could fly. Still, patience does much and this is what we gleaned :

Tortoises and pangolins are considered good eating by the Veddas ; but the porcupine they abhor, calling it a *rodiya* among beasts, and only killing it to give to their dogs. Why Veddas never eat porcupine I have not been able to ascertain : it is said that, in the old lawless days, they would go the length of burning down a Sinhalese hut in which they discovered a porcupine being cooked. Pork they love because it clears the blood, and one or two pigs a month the Vedda must have. Venison causes itching and is not so good !

Vedda cookery, simple in the extreme, can still boast some tasty dishes : *Gona-perume* is a sausage consisting of alternate layers of sambur meat and fat. *Le-perume* is the same, with the addition of a third layer of blood-clot. *Goa-thel-perume* is made by skinning the monitor's meaty

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361 "But surely there are Veddas in Galmeda; everybody told us so," I insisted.

"Veddas of a sort, yes," was the reply; "and perhaps among them, one or two good ones; but the best live away in the caves, in those rocks yonder. Now if you'd come yesterday you'd have seen two of them who brought me some *goas* in exchange for betel and tobacco."

000 Disappointment melted into sudden hope. So, there were real Veddas still left. But oh! these people. Was ever chase so disheartening? Always the promise, never the fulfilment. Were we chasing phantoms of the wilderness, mocking spirits of a dead race, intolerant of the intrusion on their tranquil sepulchres?

There was no possibility of visiting the cave-Veddas that day. So I decided to stay over and visit them the next morning, travelling across the pathless hills to the high road; while my companion,—fed up to the teeth by now at the very mention of the word Vedda, and in a bad way with festering tick-bites, heat exhaustion, and lack of fresh food—tried to dissuade me from an adventure that promised no success. But I was bent on it. So we agreed that most of the bearers should accompany him to Maha Oya by an easier route, while I remained behind with three men and a two days' ration of tinned food.

With nightfall my prospect of securing a guide to the Galmeda hills was no nearer than in the morning. The only man who could be relied on was down with fever. I was seated disconsolately in the Chetty's garden after dinner, close to a chatting group, when suddenly I saw a shadow slip in out of the darkness and join them; there was some whispering; "Ah, is this the man they call Meenemaruwa?*" I heard 648 one of my bearers ask.

241 "Yes, I am he they call murderer, rogue and everything besides." 115 The answer came loud and unabashed from the man himself.

Rumour had spoken of him as far away as Kotelinda; and it had not spoken kindly. He lived three miles up the river by himself, inspiring the neighbourhood with awe of him. He was in a quandary that night. Returning home after a short absence, he had found that his brother had been taken into custody for illicit *chena* cultivation. He waxed eloquent on his wrongs, while the others listened: "Now what I want to know," he said "is why they should have taken my brother, who is a fool and cannot say a word in his defence, when they might have taken me? No, they wouldn't do that because I can talk. My brother cultivated the *chena* it is true, but it was I who gave it to him; the land is mine. They want me to pay taxes, I who am a Vedda! My grandmother was a [826 Vedda of Veddas, you should have seen her. How well I remember the 789] piece of human liver she carried in her betel-bag. We children would take it from her and want to throw it away; she would pluck it from us, saying, 'Hu, what do you want with this, isn't it mine?' Io, why do they treat me like this? Someone is angry with me. It must be the *aratchi*. No, the *aratchi* is good to me; he and I are friends. Now *Heltyar*, what must I do? I must go to the courts myself and get a petition drawn." Thus he talked interminably, while I wondered how a Vedda could come to argue like a lawyer.

"Now leave all that aside," I interrupted, "and tell me how I am to see these Veddas of the rocks tomorrow."

*Murderer.

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He left the group and seated himself before me—a sinewy, handsome, bearded man of perhaps forty.

"Those Veddas," he said contemplatively, when I told him how we stood; "who can say where they are? In one cave to-day, in another to-morrow. They said they came from Dhik-galge, did they? But you can never take a Vedda's word for that. If they are not there—what then? All our trouble will be in vain. I cannot say I know the caves in those hills very well. I have only been among them once, and that many years ago, when I took my wife from her people. She and I wandered about there. How well she knew the trails, she who had trodden them but once as a little child; for her home, like mine, was elsewhere. I would see a track and point to it saying, 'This must be the way to the cave.' 'No,' she would say 'that leads to the wilderness; there should be a path by that tree yonder'; and she would always be right. I remember well the long tree by the Alu-galge; I shot two monkeys and we ate them there." And so his thoughts rambled amid honey-moon scenes he loved to recall.

But, as this meandering led nowhere, I offered a reward of five rupees to anyone who would show me the Veddas in their caves on the morrow, and took to bed. For long I lay pondering what manner of man was the Chetty who could live in this wilderness with a Vedda woman for wife. He seemed to know intimately every Vedda in the district, and had sometimes even shared their caves. He remained an enigma, as also that smile of his, no more than a mere display of the teeth, which imbued the knit, pathetic cast of his features with an expression whether of saintliness or villainy, it was hard to tell. Ostensibly he was here to rear cattle; but why come so far for that?

The next morning, accompanied by Meenemaruwa, the Chetty and a half-Vedda of Galmede, we set out on our quest. The plan was this; we were to travel to a spot where a certain stream crossed the path: there we would probably find foot-prints; if these led to the hills we would follow, if in the opposite direction, pursuit would be useless, as that would imply that the Veddas had returned to their homes in Bingoda fifteen miles away; for at this season the Veddas did not live in their caves, and the party we were in search of must have come on a few days hunting. I now understood the reticence of these people to take me on what might prove a wild goose chase; and learnt, what was more important, that the Veddas of Galmede were the Veddas of Bingoda.

We came to the stream; the foot-prints were there. Our guides bent down eagerly examining them. "This is Suthubanda's," they said "and this Badapissa's; this other is a woman's; no, it's a boy's." The tracks pointed towards the hills! The chase began.

Meenemaruwa led, for he alone could decipher that trail, three days old, on the hard dry ground. Once we left the stream there was apparently not the faintest indication of a foot-mark; but our guide moved rapidly along, and soon involved us in an enforested labyrinth of hills. Very occasionally a broken twig would furnish a clue. Indicating one of these Meenemaruwa said, "Now, that would never have been done had old Handuna been alive. 'Hu,' he would have said, slapping the errant one, 'do you want to show everybody the way to our caves; then where would we go if people came after us?' To the rock, the cave and the hive there must be no clue; that is the Vedda law.

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Meenemaruwa accompanied us a little way, singing Vedda songs with the voice of a priest chanting *bana*. I told him he had the throat of a drongo, which pleased him immensely. He explained, that as a boy he had been taken in hand by Buddhist priests who "straightened" his throat.

"Why are you called Murderer?" I asked.

"There was a man in our village," he said "whose wife abused everybody. I remonstrated with her, and her husband resented my interference, and bore ill-feeling towards me." (Rumour said that his relations with the woman were not quite as detached as he made out). "One day I was walking through an *illuk* field with a gun I had borrowed from a Moor, when I saw this man and two others coming towards me. The path was narrow; but who were they that I should make way for them or anyone else? This was twenty years ago, I was but a boy then. As we met, my enemy caught me by the neck and shoved me aside, and the two others struck me. I saw the devil then, and, placing my gun to the man's chest, fired; he dropped. A spark flew into my eye and, prevented my shooting the others as they ran. When I saw what I had done I went away and hid in the jungle. The first night I spent on a trestle where I used to watch for sambur; four drank at the water that night, but I had not the heart to shoot one. For a year I wandered in the forests, a hunted man, only creeping out occasionally at night to beg a little food or powder. Eventually, tiring of the life and hearing that the man I had shot had partially recovered, I sent word that I would give myself up. The *aratchi* who came to arrest me was afraid to approach me. I placed my gun aside and gave him my hands; as he clapped the manacles on there were tears in his eyes. I spent five years in various jails in the Island, seeing many places and learning much wisdom. That was many years ago; cha, I am getting older now." He left us happy with his morning's work and his well-earned reward.

The Chetty of Galmede escorted me to Maha Oya the next day where my friend, now quite refreshed, awaited me. Some hours after our arrival, I was recounting to the Chief Headman of the place, our two weeks experiences all the long and devious way from Siyambala Anduwa, when my mention of the Chetty's name suddenly electrified him.

"He came with you here, did you say?" he asked, starting up. "Then he is here now. *Aratchi*, go quick and get him. That's the man I have been wanting these two years. He's the greatest scoundrel in the Province; there are any number of writs against him; but he lives on the borders of two Provinces, and when I send my men to take him, he merely crosses over to the other side, defies them to capture him if they dare and sends back insolent messages to me. The man you call Meenemaruwa is another of his sort. If only I can get them."

That night we were dining with the Chief when a man sent a message asking if he might see him. It was the Chetty; now hand-cuffed, alas! He said something to the Chief in a whisper, and smiled that enigmatic smile of his. Was it a saint's or a scoundrel's? This time there was no doubt, for he had offered to betray his *ganja* growing accomplices among the poor half-Veddas of Galmede, as the price of his liberty.